

Green Burial Discussion Timeline

- Dec. 2018: Judith Bush requests, via email to Tony, that the Board discuss green burials and proposes having members of Sustainable Lebanon speak
- Dec. 11, 2018 meeting: Green burial was brought up as a future agenda item. In the minutes;
 - “The Bylaws permit the Board to look at alternative burials, like Green Burials. The Board will have to write language into the Ordinance if alternative burials will be permitted. Some members said Green Burial have varying degrees of meaning. If there is going to be a provision for alternative burials, it is better to work on it before the Ordinance is finished. It is more cost effective to include it in this current process. A guest speaker knowledgeable in alternative burials will be asked to the February meeting. If there is information regarding State regulations and definitions, it will be helpful to have the information before the meeting.”
- Jan. 8, 2019 meeting: Green burial was brought up as a future agenda item. A guest speaker was invited to the February meeting to give a brief presentation and answer questions.
- Feb. 19, 2019 meeting (rescheduled from Feb. 12): Green burial presentation was postponed to the March meeting. It was decided that green burial would not be covered during the initial review of the bylaws and would be a later amendment.
 - Judith Bush writes the following message for the Board’s February meeting;
 - “ At your February 12, 2019 meeting, there is an agenda item introducing the subject of making Green Burial an option for residents of Lebanon. There is increasing interest nationally in practices that avoid harm to the environment. Green Burial is one option with that goal in mind. Green Burial has also become a practice welcomed by many people who want to return to the simplicity and self-direction that characterized end of life care, including burial, in earlier periods of our history. The Funeral industry is aware of this trend, and is increasingly promoting Green Burial as an option with which they can be helpful. The information about Green Burial in the Phaneuf Funeral Home guide is quite thorough and up to date.
(Here is link to that 11 page guide:
<https://phaneuf.net/burial/education/green-burials>)
In New Hampshire, several towns have already created "hybrid" cemeteries, where green burial is welcomed in sections of existing cemeteries. In some places, Green Burials sites are identified and available as new locations for burials. We will be helped by looking at the language used in guidelines and bylaws where Green Burial has been put into place/
Some of the learning that is useful to do about Green Burial consists of "myth-busting" to understand that Green Burial practices are not problematic in relation to state laws governing burials. Two key

misconceptions concern embalming and placing bodies in vaults for burial. Neither one of these practices is a requirement beyond what a locality has put in place in its cemetery bylaws.

The City of Lebanon already allows Green Burial in the Jewish Cemetery, so a precedent exists here for expanding the practice to other city burial locations.

A national organization, the Green Burial Council, is close to finalizing a document titled Guide for Municipal Officials Developing Green Burial Cemeteries. I will be able to share that with you very soon. A national expert on Green Burial, Lee Webster, lives in New Hampshire and would be glad to come to a meeting of your Board. She is teaching a course in the Spring semester of the Osher Program, and is also doing a single presentation on this topic at The Aging Resource Center at Dartmouth-Hitchcock medical center this spring.

I appreciate the opportunity to begin this conversation and problem solving process with you.”

- March 12, 2019 meeting: Green burial discussion. Sarah Riley and Judith Bush, members of Sustainable Lebanon, and Lorraine Kelly, a member of the Sustainable Lebanon and formerly of the Lebanon Energy Advisory Committee, gave a presentation on green burials.

- Notes from the meeting minutes;

- Ms. Kelly presented a two-page letter from her to the Board explaining green burials and its benefits. She wrote:

“I am here because Green Burial is an option I’d like to exercise here in Lebanon when my time comes to say farewell.

One definition of Green Burial which I especially like, states that it is “...a sustainable way of caring for the dead that promotes decomposition of the body with minimal environmental impact. Its ecological aims are to conserve natural resources, reduce carbon emissions, protect worker health and to restore and preserve habitat.”

To determine the environmental benefits of GB we have to consider the impacts of post civil-war burial practices, namely cremation or interment of remains in a coffin and vault.

Cremation requires that remains be burned for 2-3 hours at about 1800 degrees F, consuming fossil fuel and releasing carbon dioxide, particulate matter, and heavy metals into the atmosphere. It contributes to air pollution and depletion of the ozone layer.

Interment of remains in a coffin, which is then encased in a vault, consumes precious resources and can lead to eventual contamination of soil and groundwater with embalming fluid.

Green burial, by contrast, allows organic processes to transform human remains in a natural and gentle way, avoiding the environmental impacts of current burial practices, including the CO2 emissions resulting from the manufacture of caskets, headstones and grave liners.

It was only during and after the Civil War that the use of embalming fluids and concrete vaults became common in the United States, thus delaying the inevitable decomposition of human remains which traditional burial practices encouraged.

Green burial can cost a fraction of the amount of a modern funeral. A basket or pine box can substitute for a coffin, there is no expense for embalment or a vault, and families may choose to be involved in the preparation of the body for interment.

Thank you for your attention,
Lorraine Kelly
West Lebanon, NH

Additional facts:

By one estimate, an average of 573 pounds of CO₂ are released into the atmosphere as a result of cremation.

Common fuels consumed for cremation are natural gas, propane and diesel.

In 2017 the average cost of unavoidable fees for a traditional funeral in the US was about \$8000. This does not include many additional expenses such as the cost of burial plot. Funeral costs can easily exceed \$10,000.

Sources:

NH Funeral Resources website

Green Burial Council

www.Recompose.life.com

Town of Rhinebeck, NY: Natural Burial Ground Brochure”

- Judith Bush presented a brief overview of the current status of green burials in NH, the precedent set already for green burial in Lebanon in the Jewish cemetery, and the role of funeral homes in green burial vs the alternative practice of home funerals.
- Sarah Riley explained the key elements of green burial that would be implemented in a hybrid cemetery: no embalming, only biodegradable materials used, grave depth optimized for decomposition - between 3 and 4 feet, no vaults or grave liners, and no herbicides or pesticides or additional chemicals used on site.
- “A 21st Century Guide to Green Burials” from Phaneuf Funeral Homes & Crematorium was provided to the Board as well as a resource sheet.
- A follow-up email was sent by Sarah Riley to the Trustees Chair and other City members on March 23, 2019. It read:
 - “Dear Manager Mulholland, City Councilors, Chair Painter, and Director Donison,

One of the goals of Sustainable Lebanon* is for our City's residents to have the option of choosing a green burial in Lebanon municipal cemeteries.

What do we mean by green burial? As the Green Burial Council writes on their website....green burial involves "caring for the dead with minimal environmental impact that aids in the conservation of natural resources, reduction of carbon emissions, protection of worker health, and the restoration and/or preservation of

habitat" https://www.greenburialcouncil.org/green_burial_defined.html

The Q&A section at the bottom of that page is particularly helpful in answering many questions and debunking many of the myths about green burial.

In the short term, a hybrid cemetery, as described

here https://www.greenburialcouncil.org/hybrid_cemetery_faqs.html,

may be the simplest solution, if suitable locations in some of our existing cemeteries can be found. There are numerous hybrid cemeteries in New England already, including a few in New Hampshire. Simply, these cemeteries reserve locations for green burials: sections where bodies are not embalmed, only biodegradable materials are used, there are no vaults, and graves are dug to a depth designed for optimal decomposition. All soil is returned to the ground and mounded on top of the grave to anticipate eventual settling. No pesticides or fertilizers are used and any grave markers are local untreated stone.

Longer term, a natural burial ground in a newly designated area for burial may be a good goal for Lebanon. Natural burial grounds are sites that combine green burial practices with land conservation goals. There are a couple of dedicated green burial grounds in the Northeast: Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve in Newfield

NY <http://www.naturalburial.org/> and Cedar Brook in Limington

ME <http://mainegreencemetery.com/> are great sources of information and ideas.

We are very grateful that the City has recently formed the Cemetery Board of Trustees and that the City has just approved a new full time position for a Cemetery Sexton. These are important steps for the City and its residents. We have already initiated a conversation with the Cemetery Board of Trustees about green burial. It is Sustainable Lebanon's hope that there might be a place for our voice in the hiring process for the Cemetery Sexton, and that the sexton will be, or will become, conversant with the green burial tradition, which is in fact one of the oldest of burial traditions.

Finally, we have a great opportunity, coming up in a few days, to learn from, and meet with, an expert: Lee Webster, a nationwide leader in the green burial movement, is going to be presenting **Going Out Green - Exploring Sustainable and Meaningful Funeral Options** at the Black

Center in Hanover on Wednesday, March 27, 12-1 pm. This is a free brown bag lunch event (BYO lunch). Registration is required at least 24 hours in advance. It would be great if someone from the City and on this email chain could attend this talk. Lee is willing to meet with City officials after the presentation, or later on the phone. If anyone is willing and able, we would be glad to arrange this.

Thanks for your time and best regards,
Sarah Riley, Judith Bush, & Rainie Kelly, members of Sustainable Lebanon*

*Sustainable Lebanon, a grassroots volunteer group founded in 2017, inspires and supports sustainable practices in Lebanon – working with residents, businesses, nonprofits, and the municipality, in a way that is inclusive, coordinated, and focused on a positive long-term vision.”

- April 3, 2019: Lebanon City Council Meeting held to repeal and replace the City Code Chapter 46, Cemeteries. The Chapter was passed.
 - At the meeting, Judith Bush presented the following:
Judith Bush Ward 1
“Three minutes is not much time to convey why providing the option for Green Burial to Lebanon residents, in sections of cemeteries that the City owns and maintains, is important.
I'll use this time to list the rationales that favor Green Burial, which fall into several categories - all serving goals of conservation, soil and water health, and worker safety.
Scientific: A great deal is now known about the harms of some of the practices in conventional burials: leaching of toxins into the soil and into water sources, health consequences for people doing cemetery maintenance and in the funeral industry.
Environmental: Choosing green burial is a last act of good global, as well as local, citizenship given the harms mentioned plus, in the case of cremation, fossil fuel use and release of pollutants into the air and the soil
Historical: Contemporary burial practices date from after the Civil War. Green Burial is a return to traditions that involved us more completely and directly in the final stages of the life cycle. This has a profound **psychological** benefit too.
Religious - the dust to dust Biblical injunction is the motivating principle for people of the Jewish and Muslim faiths to perform burials that are vault free; full body burials are meaningful for those of the Catholic Faith.
Collaboration with existing businesses offering Funeral Services in ways that may continue to be needed by people choosing Green Burial.
Lebanon's Sustainability Goals: Green Burial is clearly aligned with these goals. It is also aligned with one of the commitments stated in the Bylaws

written by the newly formed Board of Cemetery Trustees when it started its work in the summer of 2018: Under Section 5 Powers and Duties, part F Regulation and Management concerning the following matters, following consultation with the City Manager and Director of Public Works, Point 3 states: **Considering alternatives to conventional burials to both efficiently utilize remaining space within the cemeteries and optimize revenue.**

Providing the option for Green Burial will require work - initially to inventory the spaces in city cemeteries where a section can be designated for those requesting it. Participants in the grass roots group - Sustainable Lebanon - are interested in helping with this inventory, hoping to do so collaboratively with the Board of Cemetery Trustees and with the person who will be hired in the coming months to be the Sexton for Lebanon Cemeteries, a new full-time position.

There is also the work of educating residents and collaborating with funeral service professionals about this burial practice. We are happy to furnish documentation selected from the overwhelming amount of material you will find about Green Burial via your computer. Perhaps most valuable as a resource is the open offer from Lee Webster who is a nationally respected advocate for GB as a researcher, writer, and teacher. Lee, who lives near Plymouth NH, is very willing to meet with city officials, committees, and residents to teach about and discuss Green Burial. I've heard Lee speak to groups a number of times and always learn something new from her presentation

I request that the new Cemetery Ordinance being discussed tonight will add a sentence that allows burial without a vault, as that is the one provision in the ordinance that specifically prevents GB from happening. It is step one in opening up the option for Green Burial in our city cemeteries to Lebanon residents. Thank you."

- Sarah Riley also spoke. Her notes on green burial were:

Sarah Riley, Ward 2

"I thank the Trustees and City staff for their hard work on the revised ordinance. I have read the draft and have a few comments.

First, I respectfully request that the City give its residents the opportunity to choose a green burial.

By definition, a green burial:

- excludes embalming fluids,
- involves placing only biodegradable containers and materials in the grave,
- prohibits herbicide and pesticide use, and
- involves burying the body at the appropriate depth to enhance decomposition.

As currently written, the draft ordinance does not allow green burial simply because of section 46-7 G.

46-7 G pertains to "permanent outside containers". It requires that vaults or grave liners be used in all burials. "The following are considered permanent outside containers: concrete boxes, copper or steel vaults or cremation urns designed to withstand the deteriorating factor of the elements of burial."

The addition of the following text, or something similar, would permit green burial within City cemeteries:

Something along the lines of "This requirement may be waived in the event green burial has been requested."

I also support making further additions to the ordinance: to define green burial and to clarify where green burial is permitted.

Lee Webster, a leader in the green burial movement, lives in NH and is available to educate and guide municipalities committed to allowing green burials in their cemeteries. She is willing to meet with City staff and officials and I hope that Lebanon takes advantage of this opportunity..."

- April 5, 2019 meeting: Chair Sue Painter received an email from Mayor Tim McNamara. After the City Council meeting, he received a letter from the Hanover Public Works Director who is updating the Pine Knoll Cemetery regarding green burials. He offered to work with the Board as they continue to work on green burials. The Board decided to bring green burial back to City Council at a later date.
 - Burial options were discussed further at this meeting. Regarding green burials, they discussed consulting with funeral homes to determine pros and cons of alternative burials and any risks that would need to be considered.
 - Caitlyn Hauke offered to work on alternative burial/green burial options. The Board noted that the current cemeteries do not have enough land for this specific purpose. They hoped to continue to gather more information about burial options and planned to move forward once more information was gained.
- May 14, 2019 meeting: Craig Neil from Norwalk-Wilbert gave a presentation on burial options, including a brief overview on green burial. He noted strict green burials means no traditional casket, vault, equipment, or embalming, with use of all biodegradable materials. He also noted that there are hybrid options and that the Green Burial Council is a good resource.
- July 9, 2019 meeting: Board members received a list of available cemetery lots and land that has not yet been developed into lots. The Board requested maps of the lots to determine where there is available space and how it could be used. There was also mention of a Green Burial presentation taking place the following weekend in Woodstock, VT.
- Sept. 10, 2019 meeting: The Board briefly discussed green burial options in the various cemeteries, or creating a new cemetery. They suggested using a grassy area in the West Lebanon Cemetery but wanted more expertise on green burial. Patrick McCarthy said he would get additional information about the revisions that would need to be made to Chapter 46 to allow green burial. Caitlyn Hauke offered to make arrangements with Lee Webster, from the Green Burial Council, to speak on green burials to the Board at the next meeting.

- Oct. 8, 2019 meeting: Lee Webster presented on green burials to the Board. She described models of green cemeteries and what is happening in NH and VT with regard to green burials. She described hybrid cemeteries. Lee overviewed that there are over 22 years of data regarding green burial in the US and that the average cost of a green burial is substantially less than the average conventional burial.
 - Other notes from Lee's presentation:
 - Green burials may be preferable to traditional burials due to improved health and safety for the land and workers. She noted there is less grave sinking as dirt is mounded on top and settles over time.
 - Lee stated that green burial cemeteries usually do not sell plots, but instead sell the right to be buried in that particular cemetery.
 - Lee provided an information packet to the Board including a guide for incorporated green burials into existing cemeteries.
 - She discussed the opportunities and challenges of bringing green burials to the community, highlighting the advantages of the environmental benefits of green burials, which are a more sustainable use of resources.
 - Lee estimated one acre of land could provide over 300 spaces for green burials. Serial burials, burials that occur in the same are over time, would also increase that number.
- Nov. 12, 2019 meeting: Community members Sarah Riley, Judith Bush, and Lorraine Kelly attended and requested green burials be added to the newest update of Chapter 46. The Board said more time is required to work out the needs for green burial and will be addressed in a later amendment.
- Dec. 10, 2019 meeting: Green burial was discussed and a timeline was provided to the Board for incorporating this into Chapter 46. The goal is to have this ready for City Council in September 2020. Chapter 46 will need to be updated to reflect the addition of green burials in March 2020. Caitlyn Hauke will compile the information covered thus far in previous meetings and will provide a timeline of that discussion and the information covered, as well as any remaining gaps or questions the Board may have.

In addition to the discussions from the City Council and Board of Cemetery Trustees' meetings, there are elements of the City of Lebanon's Master Plan (2012) that would be in support of green burial. In the Energy Chapter:

- Page 13-1 paragraph B: Vision & Purpose

".....to reduce the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions that result from a fossil fuel-dependent economy.develop near-term outcomes....actions...for the environmental benefit...of the City and its taxpayers."

- Vision for energy savings

"The City of Lebanon shall be a regional leader in energy efficiency, innovation, and fiscal responsibility."

- Page 13-2 paragraph C-1

“Protect natural resources”

- Page 13-8 paragraph F-1

“The City... has a strong commitment to leading-by-example in areas such as energy efficiency...”

- Additionally, Page 8-17 describes meeting the demand for community facilities and services and includes a goal to “Begin the process of identifying and assessing potential future cemetery sites.”